

Role of Muslims in Development of Geography

Hisham bin Muhammad al Kalbi (820), who was regarded as an excellent authority for the history of the pre Islamic period. He wrote 10 books containing geographical topics.

Muhammad bin Musa al Khwarzimi: his work laid the first foundation of Arabian geographical science. His kitab “Surat al Ard” (shape of the earth) was written in the first half of the 9th century. According to Weidman, Khwarzimi took part in the scientific activities, which flourished during the time of Mammon (813-833). His work is connected with the famous map of the world drawn by many scholars for the Caliph. As to the merit of the work Nallino remarks that it is a work like of which no European nation could have produced at the dawn of its scientific activities. Khwarzimi’s work is found along with geographical names of the Muslim period a great number of ancient names also.

Al Kindi (Abu Yousaf Yaqoob) was contemporary of Khwarzimi. He wrote a geographical work under the title of “Description of the Inhabited Part of the Earth” (Rasm al Mamur Min al Ard). He also wrote on seas, waters and mountains (Risalah fi al Bahar wal Miyal wal jibal).

Ibn Khurdadbih (Abul Qasim Ubaidullah ibn Abdullah): he belongs to a Persian family, and settled in Baghdad where he made the acquaintance of the celebrated musician, Ishaq of Mousal. He studied literature along with music. He appointed the chief postmaster of Jibal province where he obtained useful information about distant regions between the years 844 and 848. He wrote “Kitab al Masalik wal Mamalik” an outstanding work of its kind. It gives a summary of the main trade routes of the world and gives description of such distant areas as China, Korea and Japan. Later geographers invariably consulted this work.

Bedouin Arram bin al Asbaj: wrote a book known as “**Kitab Asma Jibal Tihamah wal Makaniha**” in 845 which deals with the mountains of Tihamah in Arabia. Yaqoot mentions another book by the same author bearing the title “**Jazirat al Arab**” (isle of Arabia).

Yaqubi (Ahmad bin Abi Yaqoob): was an Egyptian. He visited India and North Africa and came back to his native land after his extensive wandering. He wrote something resembling a modern gazetteer, called “**Kitab al Buldan**” (**Book of Countries**) in 891. The work gives details about numerous places. He tries to explain physical and human geography of many areas. It

begins with a detailed description of Bagdad and Samara and deals with Iran, Turan and what is now modern Afghanistan. Topographical details of Kofah and Basra are provided and then follow description of central and south Arabia, Syria, Egypt and the Maghrib. He was particularly interested in the statistical and topographic aspects. Yaqubi is some time known as the father of Muslim geography. He died in 897.

Al Baladhuri (Ahmad bin Yahya bin Jabir): discussed geographical topics in many places in his writings. He refers in his “Futuh al Buldan” to bursting of the banks of the Tigris in the Sassanian period. He wrote two more books, Kitab al Buldan al Saghir and Kitab al Buldan al kabir. He died in 892.

Ibn Rustah (Abu Ali Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Ishaq): was the author of an encyclopedia “Al Alaq al Nafisah” the 7th volume of which (British museum) deals with geography. Ibn Rustah’s geographical writings have an astronomical bias; his discussion deals with a variety of topics, like the extent of the earth, the founding of Mecca and Madina, seas, rivers, climate as well as the geography of Iran and adjoining lands.

Ibn Fadlan (Ahmad bin Fadlan bin Abbas): he is one of the earliest travelers/ geographer. Caliph Al Muqtadir sent him in 921 as an envoy to the king of Volga Bulghras. On his return to Baghdad his journey in the form of a book, which is perhaps, the reliable account of that area. Yaqoot later on utilized this source in his work. Another work of considerable importance by Ibn Fadlan is his Risalah (Travel book).

Al Balkhi (Abu Zaid Ahmad bin Sahl): was born near Balakh in Shamistan. He went to Iraq and became a pupil of Al kindi, under whom he studied history and philosophy. On his return to his native land he took up service under the prince of Balakh. Balkhi is one of the early Muslim mapmakers and most of his work “Kitab al Ashqal or Surat al Aqalim” consists of explanation of charts. He also wrote on Routes and kingdoms”. He died in 934.

Ibn Said: He wrote a notable geographical work called “Kitab Jughrafia fi’l Aqalim”. On the basis of climates (Aqalim) the latitude and longitude of many places are added and facilitate the reconstruction into map.

Al Idrisi (Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Idrisi): Best known Muslim geographer in the west. He travel through Europe and stay for a long time in the court of Christian king of Sicily, Roger II. He was born in Ceuta in 1099, and was educated at Cordova. He wrote a treatise; amusement for him who desires to travel rounds the world (Nuzhat Al Mushtaq Fi Ikhtiraq Al Afaq) also known “Kitab Rugari”. He made a celestial sphere and a representation of the known world in the form of a disc, which gives him an outstanding place among the Muslim cartographers. Idrisi’s knowledge of the Niger above Timbuktu and of the headwaters of the Nile and the Sudan is remarkable for its accuracy. His work is certainly the most notable example of the fusion of ancient and modern geography.

Yaqoot Hamvi (Ibn Abdullah Al-Rumi): He was born in 1179. Yaqoot is one of the most celebrated of Muslim geographers. His great geographical dictionary “Mujam al Buldan” was finished in 1224. After 5 years he died at Aleppo. Mujam al Buldan described in alphabetical orders. The book gives detailed accounts of the Islamic lands from Spain to Transoxiana (Mawara al Nahar) and India. Another monumental work of Yaqoot was “Mujam al Udaba” (Dictionary of Learned Men) provides useful geographical information. He made a thorough study of the outstanding geographical works.

Al Bakri (Abu Obaid Abdullah) (1040-1094): was born at Cordova. He wrote geographical dictionary “Mujam ma Islam” and “Routes and kingdoms”. A Spanish geographer al Tariqi was his main source.

Ibn Jubair (Abul Hussain Ibn Jubair al Kinani): was born in 1145. After pilgrimage to Mecca he wrote his diary under the title “Rihlat Ibn Jubair” it become very popular in east and west. His writing used by many writers like Al Badri, Al Khatib and Ibn Batuta. He died in 1217.